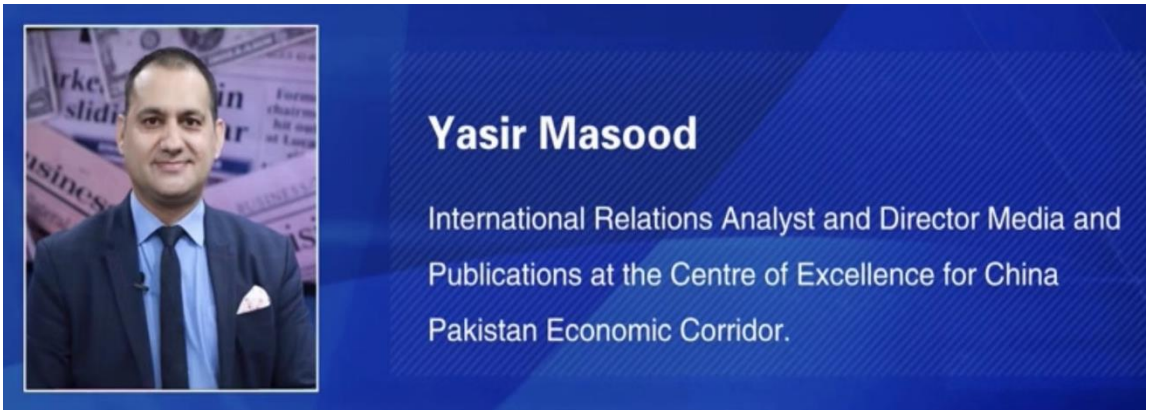
CPEC: Dismissing the Detractors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The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been up against lots of controversies since the idea was first conceived in 2013. A trail of fears is showered mostly by the debunking Indian narratives which unfortunately are being endorsed by our naysayers without realising the potential benefits forthcoming under the rubric of CPEC. Amidst this hoo-ha against CPEC, it is an opportune time to dispel the detractors who are busy inculcating their rolling over hatred hyperboles into the minds of the Pakistani masses.

In today's multipolar world order states are cozying up to each other. First, to reap the fruits of joint economic cooperation and second to secure themselves in the face of global unrest along with mushroomed threats emanating from the hegemonic powers. Following this internationally accepted truism, CPEC is making strides toward success and once it is complete, it will change the fortunes of not only the Pakistanis but the rest of the regional neighbours too. Forecasting its enormous economic benefits, the whole Central Asian states including Russia are warming up to enjoy the economic ascendance through CPEC. Our neighbouring country Iran and lots of European investors are eager to invest particularly in the coastal city of Gwadar which is emerging as a nucleus of innovative commercial activities in near future. The economic trajectory of CPEC can certainly knit together South Asia, Central Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. More interestingly the quiet rise of Bangladesh and Nepal will likely get a boost from this game-changer project, too.

Tensions between Pakistan and India have mounted as the *Hindutva* mindset has taken over Indian foreign policy since 2013. Indian Prime Minister Modi and the BJP's rancour against Pakistan is reflected by the recurrent border incursions at the LoC. Labelling CPEC as an igniter between Indo-Pak relations is a bizarre analysis drawn by some circles. Indo-Pak relations must not be looked through the prism of CPEC alone. Since, the last 70 years, the UN and the international community have been winking at the atrocities in Kashmir, which is the real reason for expanding distance between both countries. If the UN sincerely wants

peace to prevail between both nations, the Kashmir dispute must be resolved according to its resolutions. Instead of magnifying CPEC as a source of ignition between India and Pakistan, international human rights champions should admit the injustice done against the will of the Kashmiri people for so long. Matter of fact is that despite the prevailing gruesome situation between Pakistan and India, constructive cooperation in CPEC and the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC) can carry the seeds of immense potential to change their fortunes. Historic opportunities are on offer for both countries, as an economic transition is taking place from the west to the east. It is high time to rid the hysteric world of Pak-India hostility as the Tri-Star economic chain of Pakistan, India, and China can surely stoke tangible prosperity in South Asia and beyond.

It is also a conspicuous misconception that the CPEC will undermine Balochistan's prominence through the Chinese conglomerates' self-interest. Balochistan covers an area of 347,190 square kilometres (134,050 sq. mi). It is Pakistan's largest province by area, constituting 44 percent of Pakistan's total land mass with the lowest population compared to other provinces of Pakistan.

CPEC will bring more opportunities to local farmers and new avenues for cultivation will sprout because of the availability of abundant land. With advanced agricultural and irrigational methods, much barren land in Balochistan will be used to enhance crops and this will augment Pakistan's revenue that comes from the agriculture sector.

Disparagers of CPEC is also directing fabricated concerns by the people of Balochistan. Matter of fact is that with the exception of a few miscreants, a vast majority of Balochi people are welcoming CPEC, as they are aware that the Gwadar port, industrial zones enroot under construction and road network will bolster economic prosperity in this land. International investors will pour a huge sum into infrastructure and Balochistan will benefit the most. There are no incidences of any concerns from the Balochi people regarding immigrants and marginalising communities, etc., as maliciously propagated by critics. It is a common practice all over the world that economic ascendance promotes multiculturalism, by no means, do the rights and cultural identity of minorities come at stake, instead, local communities — major and minor — enjoy economic prosperity. As far as separatist movements are concerned, again, Indian-supported and funded elements are trying to sabotage CPEC. Kulbhushan Jadhav case is a glaring testimony to the fact. However, Pakistan's military with all the stakeholders has been able to uproot such developments in the last couple of years and therefore, peace and prosperity will sustain as its robust forces have the ability to defeat any internal and external evils.

Pakistan is also going through a tentative phase with Afghanistan again because of Indian growing alliance with the former. Afghanistan should realise that fueling and supporting migrated terrorists including the Afghani Taliban against Pakistan with Indian camaraderie will only invite suffering to the Afghans the most and nothing else. Pakistan has a resolute commitment to secure its borders and will not let any cross-border incursions from Afghanistan to occur now and after. Again, CPEC is offering a holistic opportunity to the Afghans to be part of a 'win-win' cooperation as economic prosperity can equip the Afghans to rid themselves of the extremist elements once and for all. If Kabul is ready to cooperate with Islamabad on security concerns, transit routes of CPEC can change the face of the Afghanistan economy.

In the region, CPEC could additionally serve as the driver for trade and economic integration between China, Pakistan, Iran, India, Afghanistan and the Central Asian States. In response to the planned criticism against CPEC, Pakistan's policy practitioners, the government, military, civil society and the media must act to spread the message of peace and prosperity to the masses ensuing from the miraculous CPEC.